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*Notes on the Historical Source Material
in the Ayer Collection on the North
American Indian presented by Edward E.
Ayer to The Newberry Library, Chicago*

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1927


ILLINOIS HISTORICAL SURVEY

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THE EDWARD E. AYER COLLECTION OF THE NEWBERRY LIBRARY

In 1911 Mr. Edward E. Ayer, a Chicago business man, presented to The Newberry Library his superb collection of historical source material relating chiefly to the discovery, exploration and colonization of this continent and to the native races of North America, the Hawaiian Islands and the Philippine Islands. The donor had been engaged for over forty years in the gathering of this library and had spent thereon lavishly of his time, his thought and of his self-made fortune. It is unquestionably the finest and most extensive collection within its special field ever brought together by a private individual. It contains at present about 49,000 volumes, bound pamphlets, manuscripts, documents and other accessioned pieces.

So rich is this special library in early printed editions, in original manuscripts, in transcripts of unpublished archive material, in original drawings, photographs and other pictorial presentation that no serious student can afford to overlook its resources or fail to avail himself of them, who is concerned with the discovery, settlement and early history of America, or with the customs, habits, manners, language or history of the native races of North America, or of the Hawaiian or the Philippine Islands.

In order, therefore, that students of these subjects may know more generally of the existence and of the free availability of this rich store of source material the following brief notes regarding some of the outstanding groups in the collection are here set down at the suggestion of Mr. Ayer, and sent to a select number of colleges, universities, public and reference libraries, and other kindred institutions.

While the North American Indian is the central figure and objective point of the Edward E. Ayer Collection, it includes of necessity many books which may easily be classed under other subjects, some books in which the reference to the Indian, or to America, is so slight that under the usual classification that reference would be lost.

Geography: Included in this section are many early books on cosmography as well as geography, all with more or less reference to America; atlases and maps, both manuscript and printed, the former including thirteen portolan atlases and eleven portolan charts, all exceedingly valuable material for the early history and development of cartography; also early voyages and travels. (1,900 volumes and about 450 manuscript maps and 180 trips across the plains, either printed or in manuscript.*)

Spanish North America: This section includes the early history of the discovery, the conquest and the

*To give the reader a general knowledge of the size and therefore relative importance of the various groups here mentioned the approximate number of volumes in each is recorded.

settlement of Mexico, Central America, the West Indies, and Florida, Texas, New Mexico, California, and the Spanish period in Louisiana. (1,200 volumes)

Supplementing the volumes in this section are many original manuscripts and about 200,000 type-written pages of transcripts from the Spanish and Mexican archives.

French Colonies in America: Includes Canada and Newfoundland, the early exploration of the Mississippi Valley and the founding of Louisiana. This section also is supplemented by many original manuscripts and by transcripts relating to the fur trade from the archives of the Hudson's Bay Company. (800 volumes)

English, Dutch and Swedish Colonies in America: As the colonists from both Holland and Sweden soon became merged with the English, they are for convenience of classification grouped together here, and this grouping follows them not only through their Colonial life, but in their conquest, exploration and settlement of the country from the Atlantic Ocean to the Golden Gate. (2,700 volumes)

Indian Warfare: In this section are included books relating to the French and Indian Wars, the American Revolution, the War of 1812, the various colonial wars, and later the Indian warfare with the United States. Here are included 430 volumes containing narratives of Indian captivity, and 70 volumes containing Indian treaties. There are also several manuscript treaties. (800 volumes)

Indians of North America—Their Origin, Prehistoric Life and History: In this section are grouped the books treating of the origin of the Indians, all the way from the point of view of those who considered them the descendants of the ten lost tribes of Israel, to that of the modern scientific anthropologist. The fascinating story of their prehistoric life is just beginning to be unraveled and told, and every year brings new revelations from archaeologists in all parts of the country. The history of many tribes is yet to be written and much can be done from sources found here. Under this grouping are books dealing also of the following matters: Indian arts and industries, trade, money, mythology and religion (including ceremonies and dances), music, physical anthropology, health and disease, missions and schools, and the biographies of individual Indians. (3,000 volumes)

Indian Languages and Graphic Systems: One hundred and eighty-eight different languages or dialects are represented in the Ayer Collection. The books illustrating or treating of them include grammars and grammatical treatises, vocabularies and dictionaries, and some few school books; translations of the Bible, prayer books and catechisms; all very largely done by missionaries, both Catholic and Protestant. Of more recent date are books containing folk-lore and myths with both free and literal translations. Supplementing these are some 55 original manuscripts, and 50,000 pages of photographic copies of manuscripts, principally in the Mayan and allied languages. The graphic systems are represented (1) by

two volumes and eight single Aztec pictographic drawings on maguey paper; (2) by 125 volumes of reproductions of ancient codices and their decipherment. (2,200 volumes)

Hawaiian Islands: In the year 1898 the Edward E. Ayer Collection fell heir (through their acquisition by the United States) to the primitive inhabitants of both the Hawaiian and the Philippine Islands. The Hawaiian Collection contains most of the early accounts and relations of the missionaries of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions, who made its history. (About 225 volumes of this historical material and about 250 volumes in the Hawaiian language).

Philippine Islands: Upon receiving the news of Dewey's victory in Manila Bay, the first book on the Philippine Islands was ordered. Within a short time all the principal sources for the Spanish period of Philippine history were in the Ayer Collection. The American period is not so strong. The printed books (about 900 volumes) are supplemented by some 200 manuscripts and illustrated by nearly 8,000 photographs, representing thirty-eight various groups.

In this section on the Philippine Islands there are 18 different languages represented, contained in about 525 volumes.

Illustrations: The illustrative material of the collection is equally interesting. There are forty-eight oil paintings including two by Charles Bird King,

painted about 1820, and one by Grace Hudson. The rest are by Elbridge Ayer Burbank. In the collection are 1232 red chalk drawings of Western Indians from life, also by Burbank; 900 water color drawings; 600 black and white (pencil, ink, etc.) drawings; 300 colored drawings by Indians; 3000 photographs of American Indians, and about 400 prints of the peoples of the Philippine Islands, in addition to the photographs referred to in the preceding paragraph.

The Newberry Library, including its Edward E. Ayer Collection, contains 450,000 volumes, and as History, Literature, and, to a lesser degree Philology, are the chief subjects in its scope, its other collections supplement in varying degrees of importance the source material in the Ayer Collection. This is especially the case in the American Revolution, the War of 1812 and the expansion of the Nineteenth Century.

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